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SUBJECT: (C) CHIRAC AND OLMEERT DISCUSS RESUMPTION OF  
ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN TALKS, REALIGNMENT, IRAN, AND LEBANON

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Elysee contacts described the June 14 Chirac-Olmert meeting as friendly and said the French president was favorably impressed by his first encounter with the Israeli PM. Presidential Middle East advisor Dominique Boche stressed that Chirac urged Olmert to resume negotiations with Palestinian Authority President Abbas, but did not press him on Palestinian assistance. According to Boche, Chirac "neither endorsed nor rejected" Olmert's realignment plan, and told Olmert France would judge the initiative based on its adherence to the roadmap's two-state vision. Boche confirmed that Chirac and Olmert had convergent views on Iran, with Olmert supportive of the P5 1 incentives package and possible "face saving" gestures for Tehran. Addressing the current state of play with Iran, Boche stated that Chirac believes that Khamenei and his inner circle are focused, above all, on gaining U.S. recognition as the ultimate guarantee of Iranian security. The same cannot be said of President Ahmadinejad, whom the French view as "irrational." Chirac and Olmert also briefly discussed Lebanon, with Olmert dismissing prospects for a breakthrough on Sheba Farms absent total dismantlement of Hizballah. Boche's pessimistic assessment of the current situation in Lebanon is reported septel. End summary.

¶2. (C) Presidential Middle East/Americas advisor Dominique Boche briefed Pol M/C and poloff June 15 on the previous day's meeting and working lunch hosted by President Chirac for Israeli PM Ehud Olmert. (Note: Olmert conducted a high-profile visit to Paris June 14-15; in addition to meeting Chirac, he had separate meetings with PM Villepin, FM Doutte-Blazy, and French Jewish community leaders. He also launched a new French-Israeli foundation to promote civil society contact, and, with Villepin, dedicated a new monument to those Parisians who resisted deportation of French Jews during World War II. End note.) Boche described talks as friendly, and said Chirac was impressed by his first encounter with Olmert, who differed significantly from the past generation of Israeli leaders -- military men such as Rabin and Sharon. Boche opined that Olmert, unlike his predecessors, was a lifelong politician and shared that point in common with Chirac. Boche added that Olmert was complimentary towards Chirac, commanding him publicly for his efforts to combat anti-Semitism and, in private, "seeking Chirac's advice" based on his years of experience in the region -- all of which added to the positive atmospherics.

DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS AND REALIGNMENT

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¶3. (C) Boche described the Chirac-Olmert discussions as principally focused on two options: 1) direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, 2) or unilateral Israel

withdrawal and determination of borders in the event direct talks are not possible or fail-- Olmert's so-called realignment plan. Boche reported that Olmert reaffirmed his strong preference for a negotiated solution and his readiness to resume negotiations and meet with PA President Abbas. At the same time, the Israeli PM expressed uncertainty as to whether he could find a Palestinian partner, given the Hamas-led government's continued rejection of the three Quartet principles -- conditions first articulated by France.

In the event no Palestinian partner could be found, Olmert stressed to Chirac that Israel could not accept continuation of an unacceptable status quo; instead Israel would have to define its own borders, which would leave the Palestinians with a contiguous territory from which to build their own state. On the latter point, Boche noted that Olmert didn't enter specifics on the geographic parameters of a possible Palestinian state; Boche interpreted Olmert's reference to "contiguity" as a reference to contiguous territory within the West Bank itself, not between the West Bank and Gaza.

¶4. (C) Boche stressed that Chirac insisted upon the need for Israel to pursue negotiations with PA President Abbas, while "neither approving or rejecting" Olmert's proposed realignment plan. Chirac told the Israeli PM that, if his realignment proposal "saw the light of day," France would examine it and judge it based on its adherence to the roadmap's vision of two states living in peace and security. Chirac added that the first option -- direct negotiation -- must be pursued with full force and fully exhausted, in order to justify recourse to the second option of unilateral withdrawal. Boche affirmed that Chirac only briefly raised the issue of Palestinian salaries with Olmert, and did not press him on the issue.

¶5. (C) Boche conceded that the GoF viewed a disconnect

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between Olmert's expressed commitment to relaunching direct talks, and Israeli actions on the ground in Gaza and the West Bank, which France viewed as undermining PA President Abbas. Boche said the GoF strongly felt that Olmert already had a Palestinian partner in Abbas, so the Hamas government's actions were irrelevant to the prospect for direct talks. Boche listed a series of counterproductive actions, in the French view, including Israel's dismissal of the so-called Palestinian prisoners' initiative, delays in delivery of arms to Abbas' security detail, and the "disproportionate" Israeli military response to Palestinian rocket attacks. On the latter point, Boche conceded that no government should accept rocket attacks on its own territory, but he concluded that the overwhelming Israeli response to what were largely ineffective, non-lethal Palestinian rockets had created "disastrous photo ops" of Palestinian suffering.

#### AGREEMENT ON IRAN, CHIRAC'S VIEWS OF IRANIAN MOTIVATIONS

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¶6. (C) Boche noted that the two leaders discussed Iran at length, with general agreement on both sides. Olmert expressed support for the P5 +1 incentives/disincentives package and efforts to reach a diplomatic solution, provided that they put a complete halt to Iranian nuclear activities.

At Chirac's behest, Olmert expressed willingness to accept unspecified "face-saving" gestures for Tehran, again, provided that Iran ended its nuclear program. Boche concluded that Olmert confirmed Israeli support for EU efforts as long as they were successful; he conceded that discussion did not address what Israel would do if diplomatic efforts failed. Boche described Israel as rightfully viewing Ahmadinejad's threats against Israel as serious and not empty rhetoric; in a parliamentary address following his meeting with Olmert, PM Villepin affirmed the GoF's commitment to Israeli security and that France would "stand by Israel and protect it."

**¶7.** (C) In an aside on the current state of play with Iran, Boche assessed that the Iranians were entering a discussion phase on the European proposal, being careful not to accept or reject it, which would feed internal political tensions. Boche viewed Ahmadinejad as still outside the circle of national security decisionmaking controlled by Khamenei, and seeking a way in. Boche added that the opaque nature of the Iranian leadership and Ahmadinejad's irrationality raised questions as to whether Iran could deal with the nuclear issue rationally. As an example of the Iranian president's irrationality, Boche cited Ahmadinejad's fervent belief in the return of the so-called "hidden imam," for which he had ordered the widening of a highway leading to Iran's holiest mosque, to accommodate the crowds who would welcome him.

**¶8.** (S) Boche noted that President Chirac viewed the Iranian leadership, aside from Ahmadinejad, as rational and using the nuclear issue principally as a pretext to rally public support in the face of the continued U.S. non-recognition, which struck at the very legitimacy of the regime. In Chirac's view, the Iranian regime's desire for U.S. recognition remained its overwhelming security concern and outweighed its insistence on its "nuclear rights." The Iranian regime was well aware that one nuclear weapon could not bring Iran the security which U.S. recognition would offer. As a result, Boche speculated, the Iranian regime would seek to expand discussions with the U.S. beyond the nuclear issue, to try to push the U.S. towards recognition.

LEBANON: SUPPORT FOR SINIORA, BUT NO DICE ON SHEB'A FARMS

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**¶9.** (C) Boche confirmed that Chirac and Olmert briefly discussed Lebanon, with not quite the same convergence they enjoyed on Iran. On the one hand, Olmert affirmed to Chirac his confidence in Lebanese PM Siniora, and support for GOL extension of control over all its territory. On the other hand, Boche suggested GoF disappointment with Olmert's stance on Sheb'a farms; when asked by Chirac about prospects for an Israeli withdrawal, which France has long viewed as a means to pressure Hezbollah disarmament, the Israeli PM asserted that Hezbollah must be fully disarmed and withdraw from southern Lebanon first; only after that took place would Israel be ready to negotiate on a possible withdrawal.

COMMENT:

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**¶10.** (C) While considerable differences still exist between France and Israel on issues involving the Palestinians, a striking transformation in bilateral relations has taken

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place since 2004, with the landmark Sharon and Katsav visits to France in 2005, and both sides stressing common ground on issues like the fight against anti-Semitism, Iran, and Gaza withdrawal. This transformation in the French-Israeli relationship has been accompanied by an apparent turnaround in French public opinion towards Israel, with a just-released Pew Foundation poll showing an equal percentage of French nationals -- 38 percent -- having sympathy for Israel, compared to the Palestinians. (A Pew survey of French respondents in 2002 showed a near 2 to 1 margin in favor of the Palestinians -- 36 percent favoring Palestinians and 19 percent favoring Israel.) We would attribute the shift in French attitudes to a number of factors, including post-Arafat revelations of PA/PLO corruption, Iranian threats against Israel's existence, and perceptions of a common struggle against terrorism. When we asked Boche to explain the shift in French public perceptions, he attributed the change almost entirely to the perception of a common struggle against Islamic extremists, present in both Europe and Israel. Boche, who served previously at the French embassy in Tel Aviv, also assessed that the French public has become more educated about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and were now less "naive" about the Palestinian cause. End

comment.

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